

Inside the CIA

For the first time, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency has made a public speech about this most secret government operation. In telling of the work of his operatives, Richard Helms noted that other countries are even more secret about gathering intelligence—what the man on the street calls spying. In Great Britain, for example, it is not even public knowledge who is in charge of such activity.

When he had finished his talk to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Helms had uncovered only the top of the CIA iceberg. He gave an inkling of the enormous store of information in its books and files and photos (some from U-2s). But of sinister activities obviously no word.

In the James Bond world of international spying many things obviously are done that no nation dedicated to righteous and ethical practices could own up to. One charge Helms did deny—that the CIA is somehow involved in the world drug traffic. Helms' speech to the editors was intended to dispel

such suspicions and his appearance did much to explain why he has been enjoying a greater confidence in his integrity, honesty and judgment on Capitol Hill.

He insisted that the CIA has no policy axes to grind, that it merely digs up information for the policy-makers to act on. And, he said, "We do not target on American citizens." He might have added, but did not, "unlike the FBI and the Army." In the end, however, Helms conceded that the American public must take his word for it that his agents do not overstep the boundaries of morality.

"The nation must to a degree," he said, "take it on faith that we too are honorable men devoted to her (America's) service."

It's frustrating in a government of, by and for the people to be asked to take anything on faith. But Helms' assurances are better than none and he himself appears to be the kind of official Washington, particularly agencies like the FBI, could use more of.